

NURSES - LINCOLN CHILDREN

DRAWER 2

LINCOLN CHILDREN

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The Lincoln Children

Nurses

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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CHICAGO DAILY TRIBUNE: TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 1928

RECALLS TIME LINCOLN SAT ON KITCHEN FLOOR

MILWAUKEE, Wis.—When Abraham Lincoln, tall and ungainly, sat on the floor of the kitchen of the old Campbell hospital in Washington with a plateful of strawberry shortcake on his lap and his long legs stretched out in front of him, he created an unforgettable impression on the mind of Helen B. Cole, Wisconsin's only living civil war nurse, who is approaching her eighty-ninth birthday, she says.

The civil war President was to Mrs. Cole, who saw him day after day

walking between the cots of the wounded and dying in Campbell hospital, a pleasant memory and an ideal.

Mrs. E. M. Stanton, wife of the secretary of war, had given eight bushels of strawberries to the hospital and Mrs. Cole, the head dietician, had supervised the baking of a mammoth strawberry shortcake. As the soldiers were lounging around the kitchen President Lincoln and his cabinet entered. There were few chairs and the dining room was filled. When Mrs. Cole brought the President a large piece of the cake he graciously took it, walked to the corner of the room, and sat down on the floor. The cabinet members soon all followed his example.

"Oldest Nurse in World"

Nursed Lincoln's Children

[Chicago Tribune Press Service.]

Sheboygan, Wis., Feb. 4.—[Special.]—The woman who nursed the children

of Abraham Lincoln at the White House now claims she is the oldest nurse in the world. Though she has passed the ninety-second milestone, her memory is retentive and many of her stories of the civil war President add to the picture of his homely virtues.

Mrs. Helen B. Cole is Wisconsin's only living civil war nurse, according to official records, having gained that distinction upon the death of Mrs. Mary A. Wardrobe, another nurse, early in 1926. She lives here during the summer and spends her winters in Washington, the scene of her service.

"I was a nurse in the Lincoln family for a while," said Mrs. Cole recently. "I was there when 'Little Willie' died in February, 1862."

It was not long after the first shot of the civil war had been fired that Mrs. Cole was on her way to Washington from her home in Sheboygan Falls, near here. Her husband had died but a few months before.

Gets Secretarial Post.

When she arrived in Washington she found that she was too young to be a nurse. She was not yet 21. Her friends obtained for her a secretarial position in the hospital corps, which she held for a year and a half. Then for six months she inspected army hospitals, which were crude affairs in comparison with those of today. Then, through the aid of a high official in the nurses' corps, who was her friend, Mrs. Cole became a nurse, though still under age.

For the remainder of the war she was stationed at one of the army hospitals in Washington, serving long, hard hours in the kitchen, in the operating room, in the wards, and wherever hands could help. There was not a great deal of organization in the hospitals or in the nurses' corps in that period. But there was a singleness of purpose and will to "fight for the cause" and win the war.

During those days in Washington Mrs. Cole saw President Lincoln often and spoke to him many times. "He came to visit the boys," she recalls, "and he would say to me: 'Hello, young lady, how are my boys today?' He always called them 'my boys.'"

The Shortcake Incident.

The day that he wandered into the kitchen and ate the strawberry shortcake on the floor, Mrs. Cole was working there, and was greatly amused by the sight of the President sitting in the corner alone munching on the cake. Mrs. Cole was in that same kitchen the morning Lincoln died. It

seemed as though a shroud had been thrown over the city, Mrs. Cole said, recalling that day, and added: "Those 1,600 breakfasts that we had prepared and sent out came back to the kitchen, every one untouched."

And Mrs. Cole had known Lincoln's assassin. She and other nurses lived at the same boarding house as Booth. She also knew Booth's brother, Edward Thomas, who then was acting on the Washington stage. Whist was the primary amusement at the boarding house, and a number of times Booth was Mrs. Cole's partner at the game. The last time was four weeks before the assassination. She said there was nothing unusual in his actions at that time to indicate the plan which the man probably was already nursing.

Returns to Her Home.

When the last of the wounded and sick soldiers were leaving the hospitals Mrs. Cole retired from the nursing corps and returned to her home in Sheboygan Falls. Since then she has spent her time between there and the east, where her friends are numerous. Once, while in Boston, she became acquainted with Theodore Roosevelt, and has in her possession a personal letter from him.

Mrs. Cole's life has been blessed with the friendships of many of America's great men and women, for she knew Gen. and Mrs. Grant, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Horace Mann, Josephine Peabody, who introduced the kindergartens in America, and Henry Ward Beecher.

She told an interesting story about John Greenleaf Whittier, whose mother always called him Greenleaf and always wanted to know why he picked all the green berries. Mr. Whittier was having his library walls decorated green. He had a particular border design in mind, so he told the painter to give him a sample of the green and he would purchase the border.

Upon his return he found a group of friends at his home who had come to call. He handed the border to the painter and instructed him to put it on the walls. The painter protested, saying that the colors clashed, but Mr. Whittier insisted.

Border Is Red.

Before the callers departed they asked to see the newly decorated library, and discovered that Mr. Whittier had purchased a red border for the green walls. It is not difficult to imagine the amusement of Whittier's friends. This incident made Whittier realize that he was color blind.

In the service of those women who voluntarily went into the hospitals and onto battlefields of the civil war Mrs. Cole feels there is a real story, and it is that story which she hopes to make a permanent record of in the history of the army nurses which she now is writing and which will be published privately soon. Much of the heroism and devotion of those women has been left untold. At the time of the war they were not officially recognized by the army, and it was not until after 1888 that the government acknowledged a debt of gratitude to them with the payment of a pension.

Mrs. Cole hopes with her story to add to the slight recognition which they have received.



MRS. HELEN B. COLE.

Mrs. Helen Cole, 92, of Sheboygan, Wis., Remembers Great President Simple and Unaffected.

By BRUCE CATTON
(Copyright, 1931)

SHEBOYGAN, Wis., Feb. 12.—A very old lady reached back into her memories today so that she could share with her fellow-citizens the series of pictures and reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln that she always carries with her.

She is Mrs. Helen Brainard Cole, one of the 45 Civil war nurses still on the U. S. Pension Bureau rolls. She is 92 now, and she was an army nurse in Washington during the dark days of the war; and for a time she stayed in the White House as nurse to little "Tad" Lincoln when the child was sick. She was present at the funeral of Lincoln's other son, Willie, who died in the White House.

Her acquaintance with President Lincoln began soon after she entered the nursing corps.

UNDER LIMIT

"The age limit for army nurses then was 30 years, and I was younger than that," she explained. "But I had been secretary to Miss Dorothy Dix, who was in charge of the army nurses, for a year and a half, and at last she thought she could trust me to be a good nurse."

"I was assigned to a hospital at the foot of Seventh street in Washington near the Soldiers' Home, where Mr. Lincoln stayed during the hot months. He'd go by every morning on his horse—his long legs dangling below the stirrups, and his tall hat, full of papers, tilted on the back of his head."

"Often I'd be waiting in front of the hospital, to go and get things for the soldiers. He'd greet me: 'Good morning, Mrs. Cole—and how are all the soldier boys? Take good care of them.'"

HOT KITCHEN

"We had an enormous kitchen there, with a long zinc table running down the middle and 36 colders working in it helping us get the meals. Mr. Lincoln and some of his cabinet members used to drop in, and Mr. Lincoln would look at the food and say he was pleased that the boys were getting such good things to eat."

"I remember one fall the surgeon told us that we could prepare a regular Thanksgiving dinner for all soldiers that were on a full diet. So I got all the nurses that could be spared and set them to making pies. I wish you could have seen all those pretty girls, dressed in white, with their sleeves rolled up, making pies."

"Well, Mr. Lincoln dropped in and watched us; and finally he began to help us, taking the pies and putting them in the oven for us."

"Another time some friend had

sent us four bushels of strawberries, and we were making strawberry shortcake. Mr. Lincoln came in just as we were dishing it up. He stood in the door, watching, and I could see that he wanted some. So I motioned to one of the boys, and he gave Mr. Lincoln a big plateful. There weren't any chairs, so Mr. Lincoln just sat down on the floor, in a corner, and ate his shortcake."

"That was the way he always was to us; simple and natural and unaffected. We never thought anything of his dropping in."

"He always suffered intensely for the soldiers. I remember after the Wilderness, we had a number of cases of lockjaw. Once I was by the bed of one lad who had lockjaw, and I was feeding him orange juice. Mr. Lincoln came in and stood there, looking down, with tears streaming down his cheeks. At last he said, 'My poor boy, I do wish I could help you.'"

SAT BY BED

Mrs. Cole went to the White House to act as nurse for Tad shortly after the Lincolns' smaller son, Willie, had died. Tad was ill of the same ailment, and his parents were suffering deeply for him.

"Tad had an impediment in his speech," she said, "and we couldn't always understand what he was saying. So Mr. Lincoln would interpret for him. The president would spend hours by Tad's bedside—he used to come in with a big sheaf of official papers and sit by Tad's bed, going over the papers while the little boy looked on."

"And then Mrs. Lincoln used to come in; and I want to say right here she was a very lovable and lovely woman, highly educated, faultless in her dress—and there never was any friction between her and Mr. Lincoln."

"Often, when Mr. Lincoln was at Tad's bedside, she'd come in and take off Mr. Lincoln's necktie for him, or pull off his shoes and put his slippers on for him. When he was working late in his office, she'd often carry a tray of food in to him, and sit and eat with him."

GRIEVED FOR SON

"Mr. Lincoln was devoted to his family. I remember him at Willie's funeral, sitting there erect, with tears streaming down his cheeks. He had on a pair of black kid gloves, I remember, that they were too big for him."

"The last time I saw Tad was some months after the war ended. It was in Boston, where there was some kind of an exposition or fair, and Mrs. Lincoln and her children were there. I found Tad sitting on the steps of a booth, crying as if his little heart would break."

"I asked him, 'Why, what's the matter, Tad?'"

"'I want my pa,' he wailed. Then he said: 'You know, if my pa was living, he'd forgive the man who shot him.'"

BREAKFAST SPOILED

A great series of pictures of Lincoln is stamped on Mrs. Cole's memory.

"At breakfast in the White House, when it looked as if Washington might have to be evacuated," she said, "Young John Hay (Lincoln's secretary) would come in with reports from the War Department, telling of the retreat of the Union army. Mr. Lincoln would be unable to eat. He'd just sit there, with his head in his hands."

"I often used to see him at midnight, too, in those days. I'd be going from one hospital to another, and I'd see him walking over to the War Department from the White House, bare-headed and bent way over."

Mrs. Cole's memory of Lincoln is the only thing that she cherishes more than her memories of "the boys" in the hospital.

NO ANESTHETICS

"When I think of those boys," she said. She paused and shook her head slowly. "I can remember when the surgeons stood at the operating tables for 36 hours straight. We had no anesthetics then—there was nothing we could give the wounded to deaden the pain except a little brandy or whiskey. You can imagine what it was like, especially when the doctors amputated. But I never heard one of the boys say he was sorry he had come."

Another sharp picture in her memory is the remembrance of the morning after Lincoln's assassination.

"The boys used to wear black skull caps in the wards," she said. "On that morning I came in and found them all bare-headed, sitting around somberly and saying nothing."

"I asked them, 'Why, what's the matter, boys?' They asked me, 'Haven't you heard? The president has been shot.'"

"We served 1,800 breakfasts in the hospital that morning. Every single one of them came back untouched."

Nurse Bares Human Side Of Lincoln

Attended Son's Funeral, Brought Another Back to Health

(Continued from Page 1, Section 2)

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LINCOLN AS WHITE HOUSE NURSE SAW HIM TOLD BY ONE WHO ATTENDED TAD



TAD LINCOLN
As He appeared in the White House—Mrs. Cole Nursed Him Back to Health

**LINCOLN ATE
HIS PIE SITTING
ON THE FLOOR---**

WILLIE LINCOLN
He Died in the White House—Mrs. Cole Attended His Funeral

**WHEN TAD
WAS ILL SHE
NURSED HIM
BACK TO HEALTH**

MRS. HELEN B. COLE
She Was a Nurse in the White House During Lincoln's Time

